

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 3967

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MARR, NATO, CA

SUBJ: CANADIAN DEFENSE DEBATE

REF: OTTAWA 3417 AND 3896

1. SUMMARY: DEBATE ON FUTURE OF CANADIAN DEFENSE GROWS
AS OPPOSITION CRITICS IN PARLIAMENT AND VARIOUS ELEMENTS
OF PRESS CONTINUE TO QUESTION CANADIAN DEFENSE POLICY.
LATEST DEVELOPMENT HAS BEEN SERIES OF LETTERS AND OTHER
COMMENTARY (MUCH OF IT FROM "MILITARY LOBBY") QUESTIONING:
CANADIAN CAPABILITY TO DEFEND SOVEREIGNTY; LACK OF
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NORTHERN AIRCRAFT PATROLS; RETIREMENT OF CANADIAN

SHIPS; AND POLICY OF ELIMINATING TANKS FROM CANADIAN ARSENAL. EFFECT HARD TO JUDGE, ALTHOUGH DEFENCE MINISTER RICHARDSON HAS RECENTLY SOUNDED SOMEWHAT MORE BULLISH RE HIS DEPARTMENT'S ACTIVITIES. END SUMMARY.

2. WITH A CABINET DECISION DUE IMMINENTLY ON ALTERNATIVE COURSES OF ACTION FOR CANADIAN DEFENSE PROGRAM (SEE REFTEL PRESSURE HAS BEGUN TO MOUNT ON GOC TO EXPLAIN MORE PRECISELY WHAT ITS INTENTIONS ARE. MUCH CRITICISM HAS BEEN LEVELLED AT DEFMIN RICHARDSON FOR LASSITUDE OF CANADIAN MILITARY EFFORT, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS WHICH HAVE COMPELLED GOC TO CUT BACK NORTHERN PATROL FLIGHTS, AND WHICH HAVE CAUSED MANPOWER LEVEL TO SLIP BELOW 80,000 "MINIMUM FIGURE" CITED AS BOTTOM LINE. HOWEVER, VERY IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT IN ALL CRITICISMS OF CANADIAN MILITARY SHORTCOMINGS, ALMOST UNIVERSAL FINAL APPEAL IS FOR A "DEFINITION" OF CANADIAN POLICY, NOT RPT NOT A CALL FOR GREATLY INCREASED DEFENSE SPENDING.

3. ATTACK ON GOC POLICY HAS CENTERED AROUND SEVERAL KEY ITEMS:

A) MANPOWER LEVELS: AS LEVEL SLIPPED BELOW 80,000, CRITICS IMMEDIATELY DREW CONCLUSION THAT GOC INTENDED TO REDUCE TOTAL MANPOWER, POSSIBLY TO AS LOW AS 50,000. EARLY STATEMENT BY DEFMIN RICHARDSON DID NOT RPT NOT DISCOURAGE SUCH THINKING, AS HE SUGGESTED A SMALL, ELITE BUT WELL-EQUIPPED FORCE, AND ZEROED IN ON PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS WHERE MANPOWER COULD BE REDUCED AS CANADA REDUCED ITS COMMITMENTS. HOWEVER, ON CTV "QUESTION PERIOD" ON DECEMBER 1 (REPORTED IN PRESS DECEMBER 2) RICHARDSON REJECTED SUGGESTION THAT ARMED FORCES MIGHT BE REDUCED BY 10,000 OR MORE MEN, BUT DID SAY THAT INFLATION WOULD NOT ALLOW A MANPOWER INCREASE ABOVE 80,000.

B) TANKS: AS DEBATE HAS GROWN, AND AS GOC APPEARS TO HAVE BACK-TRACKED ON REDUCTION OF TOTAL MANPOWER, NEW ATTENTION HAS BEEN FOCUSED ON CANADIAN TANK FORCES.
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IN THIS INSTANCE, RICHARDSON HAS BEEN MORE AGGRESSIVELY BEARISH AND RELATIVELY CONSISTENT WITH 1971 WHITE PAPER REQUIREMENT TO RETIRE TANKS FROM CANADIAN ARSENAL. OTTAWA JOURNAL ON DECEMBER 2 REPORTED THAT IN TV INTERVIEW RICHARDSON SAID "HE LEARNED DURING HIS TOUR OF THE MIDDLE EAST RECENTLY THAT THE TANK IS NO LONGER THE BEST ANTI-TANK WEAPON AND THAT NEW ANTI-TANK MISSILE WEAPONS OPERATED BY TROOPS IN THE FIELD HAVE PROVED MORE EFFECTIVE."

HOWEVER, RICHARDSON ALSO SAID THAT PERHAPS CANADA'S TANK FORCES COULD BE REBUILT (AS ISRAELIS ARE DOING) RATHER THAN BE REPLACED AND THEREBY CONTINUE TO BE EFFECTIVE ELEMENTS IN CANADIAN FORCES FOR AT LEAST THE NEAR FUTURE. CANADIAN CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF GENERAL JACQUES DEXTRAZE HAS PUBLICLY PROPOSED PRECISELY THIS.

C) NAVAL FORCES: CANADA'S MARITIME FORCES HAVE NOT RECEIVED AS MUCH ATTENTION, ALTHOUGH PRESS HAS REPORTED RECENT DECOMMISSIONING AND SCRAPPING OF ONE OF CANADA'S DESTROYERS (THE ST. LAURENT) FOR WANT OF MONEY AND CREWS. THREE OTHER VESSELS ARE ALSO BEING DECOMMISSIONED LEAVING MARITIME COMMAND WITH TWENTY DESTROYERS. NEW SHIP PROCUREMENT PROGRAM, WHICH REPORTEDLY INVOLVES FRIGATES INSTEAD OF DESTROYERS, CONTINUES IN ABEYANCE. AT SAME TIME GOC HAS ANNOUNCED BRAVE NEW POLICIES CALLING FOR IMPOSITION OF VERY STIFF FINES ON OCEAN POLLUTERS. AS OTTAWA CITIZEN POINTED OUT IN EDITORIAL, "HARSHER LAW WILL BE EVEN HARDER TO ENFORCE...IT WILL REMAIN A PAPER LAW UNLESS THE GOVERNMENT IS WILLING TO EXPAND GREATLY ITS COAST GUARD SERVICE. THERE IS NO SIGN OF THAT YET."

D) AIRCRAFT: TIED TO PROBLEM OF COAST SURVEILLANCE IS PROBLEM OF INSUFFICIENT FUNDS TO MAINTAIN EVEN ROUTINE PATROLS OF NORTHERN TERRITORIES. EDITORIALISTS AND PRESS COMMENTATORS HAVE BEEN QUICK TO POINT OUT THAT OTHERS MIGHT BE READY TO MOVE INTO CANADIAN NORTHERN WATERS AND TERRITORIES IF CANADA CAN DO NOTHING TO DEFEND THEM. BUT EVEN MORE SPECIFICALLY, THE PRESS HAS OFTEN POINTED TO VAST NUMBER OF SOVIET AND OTHER TRAWLERS OPERATING ARROGANTLY CLOSE TO CANADA, WITH LIMITED CANADIAN CAPACITY TO CONTROL THEM.

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4. THOSE ARE PRIMARY PRESSURE POINTS. QUESTION REMAINS, HOWEVER, WHAT EFFECT CRITICISMS ARE HAVING. RICHARDSON TV INTERVIEW WOULD SUGGEST THAT PERHAPS SOME MODEST PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE WITHIN CABINET ON NEED TO BE MORE FORTHCOMING AND POSSIBLY MORE POSITIVE RE DEFENCE BUDGET. IN THE INTERVIEW, RICHARDSON ALSO SAID "WE ARE MAKING ALLOWANCES IN THE BUDGET PARTICULARLY FOR THE LONG-RANGE PATROL AIRCRAFT WHICH WILL ADD TREMENDOUSLY TO CANADA'S CPABILITY FOR SURVEILLANCE OF THE NORTH...ALTHOUGH ADJUSTMENTS MUST BE MADE IN THE FACE OF INFLATION, THE ELEVEN PERCENT INCREASE IN THE DEFENSE BUDGET - IT'S NOW \$2.5 BILLION - WOULD ALLOW THE DEPARTMENT TO FACE ITS RESPONSIBILITIES...WE'VE HAD TO CUT BACK ONLY FOR A SHORT TERM..." HE ALSO CLAIMED "CANADA'S FIRST LINE OF

DEFENSE IS IN CENTRAL EUROPE AND THE 5000 CANADIAN CAREER SOLDIERS THERE WILL BE ABLE TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF THEMSELVES IN ANY CONFLICT...THE MAIN THREAT IS STILL THE WARSAW PACT AND THE EVIDENCE WE HAVE OF INCREASING NUMBERS OF TANKS AND SUBMARINES AND AIRCRAFT..."

5. HOWEVER, TEMPERING SUCH STATEMENTS ARE PRESS REPORTS THAT "THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT PRIME MINISTER TRUDEAU IS GIVING IN TO THE PRESSURE AND THERE IS SOME EVIDENCE HE IS SHOWING IMPATIENCE WITH THE MILITARY LOBBY FOR FORGETTING THAT THE POLITICIAN MAKES THE DECISIONS AND THE MILITARY CARRIES THEM OUT" (OTTAWA CITIZEN) AND THAT PRIME MINISTER IS CURTAILING DEFENSE EXPENDITURES "TO MAKE FUNDS AVAILABLE FOR GOVERNMENT SOCIAL PROGRAMS" (TORONTO GLOBE AND MAIL).

6. CONCLUSIONS: POSSIBLE 11 PERCENT INCREASE IN DEFENSE BUDGET MENTIONED BY RICHARDSON (SEE PARA 4 ABOVE) WOULD INDICATE THAT GOC IS RELENTING SOMEWHAT IN ITS DEFENSE AUSTERITY ALTHOUGH THIS FIGURE BARELY SURPASSES INFLATION RATE. AS ABOVE, NO CRITIC IS CALLING FOR SUBSTANTIAL EXPANSION OF DEFENSE EFFORT. HOWEVER, RICHARDSON STATEMENTS CURRENTLY INDICATE THAT TOTAL MANPOWER LEVEL WILL NOT BE REDUCED AT LEAST AT THIS TIME. TANKS AND LARGER SHIPS ARE NOW APPARENT TARGETS FOR ECONOMY, PRESUMABLY TO BE REPLACED BY INCREASED AIR SURVEILLANCE, AND SMALLER SHIPS

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TO HELP DEFEND COASTAL AND NORTHERN WATERS. NATO FORCES MIGHT BE ARMED WITH REBUILT CENTURIONS RATHER THAN NEW TANKS, BUT TOTAL NATO MANPOWER COMMITMENT DOES NOT SEEM TO BE CURRENT TARGET. IN ANY EVENT, EXPOSITION OF CANADIAN POSITION TWO WEEKS HENCE SHOULD SHOW TRUDEAU GOVERNMENT'S INTENTIONS AS IT DEALS WITH PROBLEM OF INFLATION, THE NEED FOR AN ADEQUATE DEFENSE FORCE, AND A CONTINUING INTEREST IN DOMESTIC SOCIAL PROGRAMS. JOHNSON

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